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THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE
SCHELLENBERG

Since Solomon's Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., no real attempt had been made to replace it. The "new" Temple had been begun by Herod the Great in 20 B.C. and, according to John's Gospel (2:20), had taken forty-six years to build. In Herod's building the actual sanctuary stood on raised ground surrounded by a large precinct. If you were a non-Jew, you would come up against a barrier with a sign: "Let no foreigner cross this barrier except on penalty of death." If you passed the point, you risked your life and would probably cause a riot. In order to make an offering, or buy a sacrifice, pilgrims had to use Tyrian shekels. These were coins which did not have the Emperor's head depicted on them, because it was believed coins which did transgressed the second Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself a graven image." In any case, because the Emperor was believed by many to be a god, he himself was an idol. You therefore had to change your money, and the people who changed it for you were taking a commission, profiting out of simple pilgrims. Likewise, you could buy the prescribed sacrifices at the Temple to save you carrying it all the way from home, but again, they were probably being sold at inflated prices, and the priests were getting a "rake-off". It is this corruption that Jesus is reacting against as he drives out the money-changers (11:15-18). Using Jeremiah's phrase (*Jeremiah* 7:11) when he had made his protest at Solomon's Temple six hundred years earlier, Jesus said they were turning the Temple into a "hideout for thieves". And not only that: all the trading was going on in the